Challenges for succession in family farming

-Perspectives and research questions

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to illuminate the different aspects of and challenges for, succession in family farming in the Norwegian context. Achievement of successful succession on family farms is not only crucial for the maintenance of active farms and for the future of agriculture but also for many rural areas. Many of the challenges facing farmers and farms related to family farm succession in Norway are similar to experiences in many Western countries (Gasson and Errington 1993, Silvasti 2003, Crocket 2004, Calus, Van Huylénbroeck and Van Lierde 2008). A central aim for agricultural policy in Norway is to maintain a living and active agriculture in all parts of the country. In this way development of agriculture is linked to challenges in rural areas related to gradual depopulation and centralization.

Agriculture, particularly family farming, has had, and still has, an important role in many rural communities as a basis for economic activity, local social organization and as a lifestyle, although its economic role has declined over time. The development of agriculture has turned into an industry where profitability is linked to increased demands for effectiveness and capital investments. New and many times large investments are often made in connection to succession. And because the choice of taking over a farm also is a choice of place to live, the choice of being a farmer has more consequences for the family compared to choices of other occupations. Therefore the new generation of farmers entering or consider entering agriculture has to explicitly reflect the different aspects of agriculture as an occupation and the implications it has for the family. By focusing on the succession process, this research aims to capture both the changes facing farmers and their families as well as the future challenges they face. In this paper we argue for a holistic perspective where the interconnection between economic, social, cultural and local aspects is taken into consideration in order to understand the challenges facing both farms and farmers concerning succession.

Our approach is illustrated in this model which emphasises the interaction and combined effects of factors related to the farm, family/household, and locality/place in succession processes.

In Norway agriculture is dominated

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by family farming with a close interrelationship between farm, family and locality which links economic production, local connectedness and social and cultural aspect of life. The challenges related to succession concern not only agriculture as an economic activity and occupation, but can be considered as indicators for different processes related to and with impacts on the future of rural areas. As an economic activity, agriculture is influenced by different regulations, agricultural policy and general economic development and other economic activities which are related to the farm and to the farming family. The local context influences the farm and the family through the local natural and social resources in interaction with regional policy, demographic development and general social development. However, the crucial factor for succession concerns the preferences and resources of the families involved in agriculture; how they want to live and how they value and consider the farm, agriculture and the locality. The challenges related to succession in family farms concern therefore how the way of life, including how the place is conceived by the potential farmers/successors and their families, what kind of life they want to live and also what kind of alternatives they consider. Taking over a farm is a decision with long term consequences and involves perceptions of future opportunities in agriculture.

As agriculture involves the use of land, the local natural conditions for farming related to landscape, climate and quality of soil are crucial. Because the geographic conditions vary considerably between different parts of Norway there are significant regional differences in conditions for agriculture. The structural changes therefore have different impacts in different regions. Changes are leading to fewer and larger farms due to increased competition between farmers to make production more effective. Smaller farms without economic assets to increase production will face increased challenges concerning the level of income and profitability. This development has implications for both farmers, farms and for the localities.

A central question concerning succession on family farms is what are the important goals for succession? What can be considered a successful succession process? And for what and for whom can it be considered successful: for agricultural production, for the maintenance of the cultural landscape, for income provision for people who want to live in rural areas or for the maintenance of an agricultural property within a family? Another aspect of this development is how farmers are represented in the public discourse and in agricultural and rural policy which not only has political consequences but also influences the decisions concerning succession in different ways.

Family farm succession is an intergenerational transfer of a farm and involves three interrelated processes: inheritance, succession and retirement (Errington 2002). The relationship between the generations and how this withdrawal is handled is therefore also a central aspect of the succession process. Succession means that a younger generation takes over from the older. Therefore, questions related to social and cultural changes between generations are relevant for understanding the challenges in the succession process. Consequently, a study of family farm succession can be a way to analyse processes of social and cultural continuity and change in rural areas.

A study of family farm succession focusing on individual households and farms can also be a way of studying how different processes which are generated at a structural level, are
manifested at an individual level. At the same time an understanding of these processes at
an individual level contributes to an understanding of the development of agriculture. The
main perspective in this paper is to understand family farm succession as a process in the
interface between the farm, the family and the locality. The challenges, and therefore the
perspectives and research questions will be related to different levels and to the intersection
of economic, social and cultural issues.

The paper starts with a short description about the future of agriculture in Norway using
studies of existing and potential new farmers (with rights to farms) as a point of departure.
This is followed by a presentation and discussion of the Norwegian Allodial Act. In the next
part we discuss challenges for family farm succession in more general terms looking at
challenges related to the farm and production, the place and locality and the household and
family. In the last section we discuss challenges for family farm succession in the intersection
between the interests of future farmers, rural areas and agriculture as an industry.
2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AND CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE AGRICULTURE IN NORWAY

A White Paper on agriculture (NOU 2004:2) claims that agriculture constitutes an important part of the economic base in many parts of the country, particularly in rural areas. However, as will be shown, it is in the most marginal regions that the motivation for taking over the family farm is lowest. As in many other countries there has been a considerable reduction in the number of farms in the preceding decades. In 1959 there were almost 200,000 farms in Norway but today this number is reduced to less than 50,000 active farms, and during the last 20 years there has been a 50% reduction in the number of farm units in production (Andgard, Elby, Hillestad, Klem 2009). This reduction has been most noticeable in northern Norway where 42% of farms went out of production between 1999 and 2009. The decrease in the number of farms in northern Norway is 10% higher than the Norwegian average (Statistics Norway 2011). In 2006 only 17 percent of all active farms in 1969 were still in production. These active farms are those who are left to ensure the societal duty of maintaining the region’s varied agricultural landscape (Puschmann and Stokstad 2010:13).

Due to the increased demands for effectiveness from the market and agricultural policy, more farmers choose to shut down agricultural production, particularly in the more marginal areas. In some of these areas it is possible for only very few farmers to compete by shifting to conventional volume based production due to geographical and market conditions. The result is often fewer and larger farms which include rented land from neighbouring farms which have closed down. And in some rural localities there is only one big farm where there was formerly a group of farmers.

The Allodial Act has a strong position in Norway in securing the family the right to land, and about 80% of farms are transferred to new farmers in the next generation through use of this Act (Jervell 2002), either on their own family rights to the farm (74%) or on their partners (8%) (Logstein 2010). On the other hand there is a reduction of those who want to use this right. In a survey in 2009 among holders of allodial rights, 54% had decided to take over the farm or thought that they would take over the farm (Andgard et al. 2009), reduced from 67% in 1996. However, there has not been the same increase among those who believe they will not take over a farm (25% in 1996 and 28% in 2008). However, there has been an increase among those who are undecided from 6% in 1996 down to 17% in 2008.

Among active farmers it is only 11% who do not believe anybody would take over the farm, but 27% do not know. And 60% of today’s (2010) farmers would recommend their children take over the farm (Logstein 2010). There are however significant regional differences in motivation for succession related to the conditions for agricultural production. In the eastern (and central) parts of Norway, 66% are planning to take over the farm while the number in the more rural northern Norway is only 37%. In the eastern part only 21% thought negatively about succession while in northern Norway this figure was 41% (Andgard et al. 2009). In many regions the future for many farms is relatively uncertain and many farmers worry about whether the next generation is going to take over the farm or not (Melberg 2002, Kvendseth 2003). The amount of those who don’t know or are not expecting any heir is high in northern Norway (respectively 35% and 20%) (Logstein op.cit.).
Motivation for succession is also related to a combination of conditions for different types of production and regional differences. Milk and meat production dominate in northern Norway and the motivation to take over this kind of production is among the lowest (49% (milk production) and 46% (meat production) compared to production of grain which dominate the eastern and central parts of Norway where 64 % of the holders of allodial right plan to take over).

The three most important factors which motivate people with alodial rights to take over the farm are: interest in farm work (men more than women), interest in living at the farm (women more than men) and a desire to see the farm stay in the family (women more than men) (Andgard et al. 2009). When they are asked to specify the aspects that are important for choosing the farm as a place to live, three factors are emphasized: social network and belonging, good conditions for raising children and the availability of good jobs. This shows the interconnection between the farm as an occupation and source of income, as a place to live and a way of living and the symbolic aspects of the farm related to identity, belonging and tradition.

The three most important reasons for not wanting to take over the farm are: that it will cost too much economically and in terms of effort and work compared to expected income (men more than women), choice of work and education is not compatible with taking over the farm (men and women equal) and lack of interest in agricultural work. In addition, not wanting to live where the farm is located is also mentioned by 11% of participants. In a study of holders of alodial right in 2002, economic conditions are a more important reason compared to 1996 (Kvendseth 2003). According to Angard et.al (2009) 70% of the potential new farmers consider the economy to be the main challenge. This corresponds to the reasons the present farmers give for lack of successors which are related to the economy, low profitability and a wish for a better paid job and lack of interest in agricultural work (Logstein 2010). The increased attention on economic aspects can be related to the changes in agriculture where there are demands for investments and therefore increased focus on the profitability of the investments. The low income from agriculture is reflected in farmers’ participation in work outside the farm. In the national survey of farmers, 62 % worked 200 hours or more outside the farm while 49% worked 850 hours and more over a year. The farmers’ partners also perform much work outside the farm: 78% work 200 hours or more and 64% worked 850 hours or more (Logstein 2010). The availability of additional jobs will therefore influence the economy of the household and the decision to take over the farm.

**Discourses of the future of agriculture and future farmers**

In Norwegian regional politics agriculture has had an important role in securing settlements and economic income. Heggem (2008) argues that Norwegian agriculture and farmers will face considerable changes related to agriculture and settlements in rural areas which will change the meaning and content of what it means to be a farmer as well as the meaning of agriculture. Agriculture and rural areas have had concurrent interests. Today it is a question of whether the development of agriculture will benefit rural areas and whether rural areas are the best places for agricultural production. For holders of alodial rights who are interested in living in rural areas, agricultural work may not be the best option economically and regarding time that needs to be allocated for work. And for those who are interested in agricultural work, the areas relatively close to urban centres might seem more suitable and
attractive for agricultural production. The positive mutual relationship between agricultural production and rural areas, particularly in the more peripheral rural areas, is therefore under debate.

Agriculture is changing and so are the images and representations of farmers; certain types of farmers are produced in the representation, required through expected competence and encouraged through the structural changes in agriculture and the agricultural policy. Heggem and Bjørkhaug (2009) discuss the different images or ideal types that are presented as the future Norwegian farmer through agricultural policy, from the “state protected” producer from the 1970s, the market oriented farmer from the 1980s and then the manager of cultural landscape and multifunctional provider of consumer’s goods of the 1990s onwards. One of the main changes in the representation of farmers in the Norwegian context has been the development of an image of the farmer from a producer of food to a producer of the cultural landscape. This is related to how economic support and subsidies are given. Changing production to farm tourism or niche products is also possible for some farmers, but for others changes are difficult, both economically and culturally (Rønningen, Flø and Fjeldavli 2004). After global shocks on the financial and food market of 2007/2008 in addition to climate change, renewed attention has been drawn to the importance of food production in itself. This might affect the way subsidies are canalized and the status of farming.

How the potential new farmers interpret the images that are represented as the ideal future farmer may influence their decision to take over in different ways. These images are related to regulations and political measures and therefore influence the practical aspects of agriculture in addition to providing symbolic representations of the farmer. A relevant question is therefore what kind of images do the potential new farmers have of themselves and of the public images of farmers? And how does this influence whether or not they take over the farm and how they develop it?
3. THE ALLODIAL LAW – RIGHT, DUTY AND BELONGING

The allodial law represents a central mechanism for regulating how succession on family farms is carried out in Norway. The purpose of the allodial law has been to secure the property rights of the farming family for the entire farmed land and the transfer of this land to the next generation in ‘one piece’. As such it has also hindered accumulation of huge amount of land into few families or firms and that farm land becomes a capitalistic good on the market. The allodial law, stemming from 1000AD (Gjerdåker 2001) ensures the first born child of the farming family the right to the farm. From 1974, this also included girls born after January 1 1965. When a holder of the allodial right uses the right to take over a farm, the duty to farm is put into effect (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2009). The Allodial law has been revised many times. The most recent revision came to its conclusions in 2009 after considering the effect of the law. The allodial law is pursued with some changes regarding minimum size of farms enrolled in the act and limitations of who is considered allodial descendants (direct line) and for how long the right can be claimed when the farm is sold out the family. The commission considering the need for the law emphasised the positive effect it had for women. Fourteen percent of farmers in Norway were women in 2010 (Logstein 2010) and without the law it might have been fewer.

Agriculture is a place bound production in a double sense, both geographically/spatially and socially. The close connection between the farming family and place, between identity, kinship and farm is a central issue in studies of agriculture and farming (Thorsen 1993, Haan 1994, Gray 1998, Daugstad 2000, Johnsen 2003). The allodial law can be considered as a juridical symbol or expression of this close connection between family and land. The family farm can in many ways be regarded as a material and symbolic expression of the family’s local belonging and identity. Therefore the farm does not only represent individual belonging, but also belonging in a more historical context to the place and as a part of a larger kin group. In a study from a rural locality in Norway, Daugstad (1999) argues that the interest for farms and family farm succession far exceeds the material value. Daugstad (op.cit) discusses the importance of the farm as symbol of kinship, belonging and identity. The significance of agricultural properties for the feeling of home and belonging is emphasized in a study of smallholdings by Flemseøter (2009) who found that many farmers are reluctant to sell these properties out of the family.

Also in a study of farmers in Finland, Silvasti (2003) argues that continuity of the family farm is still the most important and widely accepted goal for farmers. Silvasti uses the concept of ‘script’ as a kind of mental map which is developed and used to organize behaviour along socially appropriate lines. In her data Silvasti identifies three scripts: 1) continuity of the family farm, 2) the gendered division of labour, 3) a relationship with nature mediated by productionist farming strategy. Emotional attachment to the land and the preservation of inheritance and family tradition are central values. The presence of norms and traditions has also been found to ensure family inheritance in Sweden (Gulliksen 1999.)

This kind of attachment to place will vary, partly dependent on how long the family has been represented on the farm. The longer the history of the family on the farm, often the more the next generation feels the obligation to continue the family’s presence on the farm.
Maintaining the farm can therefore be seen partly as a tribute to former generations, and as a way of ‘paying back’ the former generations’ efforts to hand over the farm to the next generation in an improved condition. This is part of the agricultural ‘ethos’ (Vedeld, Krogh and Vatn 2003). Affection, feelings for the family farm and a moral commitment towards the family are embedded in many farmers (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2009). These feelings are legitimate factors for choosing to farm and to transfer the farm to a successor of the same family (Daugstad 2000). However, it can be difficult to distinguish clearly between interest, duty and sense of belonging and there might be ambivalence concerning taking over the family farm. Two thirds of present Norwegian farmers feel it is a duty to continue farming (Logstein 2010). On the other hand, 59% of the holders of allodial rights describe it as a privilege being in this position (Andgard et al. 2009). Feeling obligation for the continuation of the family farm is therefore not a one-sided negative experience for farmers.

The allodial law secures family succession and ensures not only a right, but also a duty to farm (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2009). The “duty” to inherit the farm may also hamper sale of farming properties, as was the intention of the law. This duty to farm might also impede a positive development of agriculture if the farmer lacks motivation. This experience of duty to keep the ownership in the family and connectedness to the place is found to be so embedded in farming families that it also hinders sales of properties that are too small or marginal to be included in the allodial law (Flemsæter 2009). When the allodial law was revised it was expected that many farms could be ‘released’ for sale. This did not happen. Instead the unintended effect for many properties is that properties are still owned by the farming family, farm land is leased out or lies fallow, and buildings are used as second homes. In his study of smallholdings, Flemsæter (2009) found that emotions around the family property and the place prevented sale. This indicates that norm, traditions and emotions might be stronger than laws when it comes to succession of farms. This is also a challenge for the future of farming and settlement in rural Norway.

Taking over the family farm on allodial rights involves something more than ‘just’ buying a farm. It has been found that production on family inherited farms is more stable than on farms run by ‘newcomers’ to the farm (Bjørkhaug 2006c). This involves motivation for converting to organic (Bjørkhaug 2006a), or changing production completely (Bjørkhaug 2006c). In studies of rural entrepreneurship on farms, it was evident that many entrepreneurs were newcomers to farming (Rønning 2008, Bjørkhaug and Kvam 2011). When change or new activities are necessary for the continuation of farming, newcomers can represent a valuable resource.
4. WHAT IS A FAMILY FARM? AND WHAT IS A FARM/AGRICULTURE?

There are discussions about how to define a family farm. Common definitions include four factors; land, capital, management and labour together with household consumption and reproduction of labour (Johnsen 2004). Usually a family farm is referred to as a farm which is owned and run by a family (Bleksaune 1996). Gasson and Errington (1993) propose a definition of the family farm where the family members' contribution of capital and/or labour is given relatively small emphasis. Bleksaune (1996) criticises this position and proposes instead an analytical division between the family as a decision making unit and the farm as a production unit. In this way it is possible to analyse the interplay between these structures and include the family members' off farm economic activities as part of the dynamics on the family farm. The necessity of this division is further strengthened by the fact that 94% of Norwegian farms have off farm income and 72% of the farming households collect more than 50% of income from off farm work (Bjørkhaug and Almås 2010). Gray (1998) argues for developing an alternative and complementary definition of the family farm based on the everyday life of those who live and work on the farm. He focuses on common activities and values for family farms instead of what distinguish family farms from other kinds of farms.

In Norway the dominate form of farming is the family farm, understood as a farm where the farm is owned and managed by the farmer who also lives at the farm with their family. Therefore it is not central to distinguish between family farms and other types of farms. At the same time it is important to understand the dynamics between the family as a social unit based on family relations and the farm as a unit based on certain activities/tasks and economic resources. In this context the distinction between task and teams could be useful (Grønhaug 1974). Some tasks are related to the running of the household and family, and some tasks are related to agriculture, and often, these tasks are performed by different teams of personnel. By using these concepts it is possible to capture the organization of farm work which may involve neighbours, other relatives, friends, hired labour in addition to family members.

The close interrelationship between family life and economic/working life can be considered the central aspect of the family farm. As a place to live, there is an overlap between the locality of the farm and the home place for the family. Concerning agricultural activities Bolin (2000) argues that the family farm is the best way of organizing farm production because it can mobilize labour in a more flexible way than other kinds of production organizations. According to Bleksaune and Haugen (2002), unpaid work in family farm households is of crucial importance to the livelihood of the family and also to other family enterprises (Johnsen 2003, Wheelock and Mariussen 1997). The question is how are different family members involved in tasks which are related to farm activities? How are they recruited to the tasks, what are they expected to do and how are they rewarded? These questions concern the mutual integration of farm and family.

Agriculture can still be characterized not only as an occupation, but also as a way of life. However, there seem to be changes putting pressure on the traditional way of life where the family members function as unpaid labour. Some argue that agriculture is transforming into
an occupation similar to any other occupation (Vartdal 1997, Bryant 1999, Pettersen 2001), and it is possible to claim that agriculture has changed from household based production to individual employment typically undertaken by the male in the household ('one man’s work') (Wiborg 1997). This also involves changes in the perception of the farm as a basis for economic activity where agriculture can be compared to any other business or firm (Alsos, Ljunggren and Pettersen. 2003, Carter and Rosa 1998).

In an analysis of different ways of living, Højrup (1983) has developed the concept of life forms as a theoretical tool for contrasting aspects of people’s everyday life concerning the interrelationship between family life, working life and leisure time. He distinguishes between three main life forms: the independent life form, the labour life form and the career life form. A central aspect of the independent life form is that the individual controls his/her own production and controls the means of production. The production is family based and the production and reproduction are integrated parts of the family’s total activity, related to both income and way of life. The borders between working life, family life and leisure are not very clear. Freedom and independence are central values. Agriculture, fishery and family based crafts are examples of this life form. In the labour/worker’s life form the worker does not own the means of production, but sells his/her labour. The family does not participate in the production, but has responsibility for reproduction. Working time, work life leisure and family life are clearly separated. The career life form has elements from both of these life forms. While the wage labourer sells his/her work time, the career oriented sells his/her human capital, competence and knowledge. Similar to the independent life form, there is no clear border between work time and leisure time. The household does not participate in the production, but constitutes an important base and a kind of “ground service” for the career oriented. There has been much criticism against these concepts; both for reification and lack of a gender perspective, but an important point is that they illuminate that there can be different logics, cultural values and organizational aspects related to different kinds of work and production. This kind of perspective can be important for understanding challenges and changes in agriculture. Members of many agricultural households participate in work that can be described as part of both the independent life form and worker’s life form. A question in this context is what are the kinds of values and logics which shape the relation between family life, working life and leisure, and how do these influence their priorities in allocation of time and economic resources? In this context gender is a central aspect as the gendered division of the labour market and the gendered aspect of agriculture offer men and women different opportunities and expectations with implications for agriculture and agricultural families.

Several studies show that younger generations are less willing to be tied up by production of milk and meat, and they are more concerned about having possibilities for leisure and holidays (Kvenseth 2003, Lønning 2000). Agricultural work seems to have lost some of its influential force on the family members’ work efforts. In a study of three generations of farm women in Norway, Thorsen (1993) states that the younger generation regards the farm as a means to serve the family and not the other way around as the situation was in earlier generations. The family has become a life project on its own and the family farm has lost much of its symbolic power for legitimizing work efforts on the farm. This can be connected to discussions of cultural changes in modern society where more emphasis is put on the individual and where the protestant ethic with emphasis on duty and hard work seems to be
weakened. In a study of attitudes of three generations towards work, Almås et al. (1995) found that for the younger generations, work is more important as a source of meaning and identity compared to the elder generation where having an income was more important than the specific job. The younger generation is also more concerned about having time for leisure, and in agriculture, lack of leisure time and holidays is something many farmers find unsatisfactory (Melberg 2002). The cultural changes related to the younger generation’s attitudes towards work may therefore represent a challenge for family farm succession. Using Højrup’s concepts, the question will be whether the independent life form will correspond to the dynamics of how the potential new farmers and their partners organize their family life and working life.

Burton (2004) emphasizes the importance of cultural factors related to identity and agriculture’s symbolic meaning for understanding farmers’ actions and changes in agriculture. He argues that there may be reluctance for changing from productivism to other kinds of production as it may involve a loss of identity as the “good” farmer and the social context this identity is related to. Conventional agricultural production represents another basis for identity different, for example, from being a leisure provider, public custodian of the countryside or a shop keeper. Johnsen (2004) has also discussed the importance of the orthodoxies regarding what is considered as appropriate farm practices in how farmers experience going ‘against the grain’ (2004:427). However, in her study from New Zealand she found that these cultural expectations appeared to have neither precluded the farmers from nor encouraged them to adopt particular strategies (2004:427). Instead she observed a mutual and gradual change in attitudes and practice. Bryant (1999) asks what constitutes occupational identities in family farming today and argues that there appears to be a chipping away of traditionality in occupational identities in agriculture and an increasing complexity and diversity in methods of farming and in understandings of the self (Bryant 1999:256).

How the holders of allodial rights experience the representation and expectations related to being a farmer, both in a national and local context will influence how they think about the attractiveness of taking over the farm. This can also influence how he/she might want to change the combination of the farm as a source of income, as work and the symbolic aspects of agriculture. Changes in agricultural policy and economic conditions will also play a role concerning what kind of occupational identity and strategy are to be encouraged.
5. CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE PRODUCTION

The common basis for agricultural production is the use of land. However, the agricultural sector comprises a variety of production sectors and ways of living. Therefore the challenges regarding family farm succession must be understood in context of these differences. The connections between occupancy of holdings and the management of land are becoming ever more complex as Lobley and Potter (2004) state, and there is a great diversity in what being a farmer implies. This includes a variety of concerns about how much income the farmer receives from the farm and how much time they spend on farm work. Some are full-time farmers, others are part-time and hobby farmers with a diverse pattern of sources for additional income. There is a span from commercial farming with strong emphasis on the economic aspects of the farm to farm activities and production which are marginally profitable and have equally or more value related to a way of life than as a source of income. There is also variation regarding the use of the land for conventional mono-production or plural production and multifunctional production. This variation concern how much income the farm provides in the family economy, how much time the family members spend on farm activities and also the symbolic value which is attached to the activities and to the farm.

Labour input in production; intensive/extensive
Agriculture includes different kinds of production which influence both organization of labour, the intensity of labour and economic factors. Different kinds of production are related to different production ‘regimes’ with different requirements of organization and means of production. Whether a farmer produces vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, corn, have sheep, cows, pigs etc. or different productions in combination, it requires different kinds of input of labour both daily and seasonally. The different kinds of productions are also linked to certain political measures and economic incentives. Taking over a farm comprises a great variety of adaptations. Therefore the kind of production occurring on a farm is of great importance for the motivation for succession.

Whether the production is intensive or extensive influences the possibility for off farm work but also vacation and leisure time. Intensive farming like milk and meat production requires the presence of the farmer every day of the year. In contrast, extensive farming of grain production is concentrated to just a few hectic months of the year. Norwegian farmers in dairy production have been found to lack professional network and feel lonely at work (Fjeldavli and Bjørkhaug 2000). Holders of alodial rights on farms with production of milk and meat are, as has been shown, among the most negative towards taking over the farm (Kvendseth 2003, Andgard 2009). The same pattern is also found in Spain by Ochoa, Oliva and Sáez (2007). In contrast, holders of alodial rights on farms with production of grain have the most positive view toward taking over farms (Kvendseth 2003, Andgard 2009). This kind of production can easily be combined with other occupations and does not tie the farmer and his family to the farm on a daily basis. Different kinds of production therefore require different input from farmers and so impact farmers and their families lives in different ways. Table 1 shows that grain producers are the most optimistic regarding expected family succession.
Table 1: Expected succession on farm by main production. Percent. (N=1548)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family successor</th>
<th>No successor</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock husbandry</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grain</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture/fruit</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>67</strong></td>
<td><strong>164</strong></td>
<td><strong>417</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square 29.084, df 10, sig .001
Source: Trender i Norsk landbruk 2010.

Farmers in labour intensive productions like dairy and livestock husbandry are less sure of possible family succession than farmers with other types of production.

**Economic outcome**

The relatively low economic outcome from agriculture compared to other occupations has been characteristic of the sector. However, there has been an increase in farmers’ discontent with the income from agriculture in recent years and as has been shown, considerations related to the economic aspects of agriculture are central reasons for those who do not want to take over the farm (Andgard et al. 2009, Logstein 2010).

Future prospects of farming can be measured through attitudes of new investments on the farm in general maintenance and in further development of the farm. The interest in new investment can be seen as an optimistic view of the future of farming. On the other hand, studies show that the motivation for investing and reinvesting in farm land, properties and machineries is low when level of income from farming is low (Bjørkaug 2006b). Research has shown that optimistic views of economic prospects correlate with a wish to invest in the farm (Bjørkaug 2006b). The investment prospect was also found to be stronger among younger farmers than older farmers but also among those with a future successor in sight. This indicates that farm maintenance is connected to a farming ethic of keeping the farm for the family and not investing for an increased market value of the farm.

While most farmers have for a long time adopted a strategy depending on a substantial amount of off-farm income, a large group of farmers are adapting so well to an off-farm labour market that farming remains more like a hobby (Bjørkaug op cit). Production on these farms will possibly end, the land will be sold or leased out, or will remain in the family as a holiday property. Future farming in Norway depends upon farmers’ ability to increase income from farming. Normally, profitability is a clear aim within the business economy. However, agriculture is not an ordinary business, and the boundaries between family and business are not always clear. A question would be how much the rest of the family is willing to ‘pay’ in low income or high labour input for this way of living. Farmers are found to be as satisfied with life as the average Norwegian population (Løwe 2004, Barstad og Løwe 2009). This could indicate that the economic aspect is not considered a significant problem for farmers compared to other aspects of the way of living. When it comes to pride, and opinion about own work as farmers, feedback from local colleagues and the local community counts...
more than public opinion polls (Farstad 2006). Having colleagues is therefore important for the potential prosperity of farmers, as well as a social network.

The economic situation for farmers is also influenced by formal organizations. Norwegian farmers have a strong relationship with the state through farmers’ organisations (Farmers Union and Small holders union) and agricultural cooperatives. Norway still has a comprehensive system of agricultural subsidies to farmers and strict control of imports of competing agricultural products. Yearly, agricultural authorities and the farmers’ organisations meet to negotiate on target prices on agricultural products and the direct payments to farmers. With a substantial member affiliation to the Farmers Union (from 52 to 63 percent in the 2000’s) and between 10 and 13 percent members (during 2000’s) in the Smallholders Union, close to 8 of 10 farmers are represented in the yearly negotiations. The market regulation is in turn carried out by the agricultural cooperatives. The cooperatives are suggesting a market regulation levy which the farmer has to pay from his market price and it will vary according to the amount of production and how the market is going. The cooperatives have an obligation to receive products and to sell to private refiners. Through this system, rural policy of scattered settlement and employment is ensured.

The economic dimension has also a subjective side related to living conditions which concern more than the economic basis for living. The economic gain from agriculture can be considered a symbol of the social valuation of this kind of production and farmers compare themselves to other occupation categories (Rye 2002). If farmers value their living conditions as lower than other groups in society, subjective quality of life decreases. It has been found that farmers with off farm work are more satisfied with their life than other farmers (Rye op. cit). In 2010, 80 percent of Norwegian farmers had off farm work (Bjørkhaug and Almås 2010). The low economic output from agriculture has therefore both a practical aspect related to basis for income for the household and a symbolic aspect concerning the representation and valuation of an occupation with consequences for identity.

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6. **CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE LOCALITY**

Agriculture is a place bound production therefore the spatial and local context is important for agricultural activity in several ways. The geographical importance concerns natural resources and topography and the geographical position in relation to other localities. The locality is important socially related to demographic factors, social organization and social networks/social capital. The locality is also important culturally concerning history, traditions, norms and values. Places are also shaped by political factors through the geographical distribution of services in the welfare state, regional policy and economic policy, including agricultural policy. The interplay of these factors constitutes the context for the farms and influences the attractiveness for taking over a farm.

**Regional variations**

Prospects of a farm successor differ across Norway. Farms in productive areas in the southern parts are more attractive for holders of allodial right than farms in the northern and more rural regions. Similar regional differences can also be found in other countries (Burton and Walford 2005). In agriculture, land, and therefore the quality of land, is a central economic asset. The soil, temperature/climate, topography etc. influence what kind of production is possible and influence the outcomes of production. Some regions have natural advantages and disadvantages for certain agricultural productions and productivity will therefore vary regionally. In Norway these natural regional differences are transformed into a system of regional specialization of production which is also reflected in economic incentives and policies. The agricultural subsidies are also differentiated according to natural advantages through the agricultural agreement (Jordbruksavtale 2010-2011). In 2010 these were divided into price subsidies that vary between 10 different geographical zones in Norway. The regional differences in price reflect the patterns of figure one, with lower prices in more productive areas and higher prices in less. Milk production in arctic, mountain and some coastal/island areas receives the highest price subsidy on milk. The same pattern is found in regional price subsidies on meat. For eggs, arctic egg production in the three counties in northern Norway subsides are higher than in other counties due to productivity differences, the same applies for potato production. In addition to price subsidies, the agricultural agreement includes production subsidies. Here regional differences also occur with more subsidies for milk production in northern Norway and less for Jæren (south west) compared to the rest of Norway. Further, regional differentiation exists for subsidising livestock husbandry, horticulture and production of fodder according to set zones. Figure 1 shows the differences in agricultural land in production in Norway in 2009.
The natural resources of the farm do not however represent a static entity but can be developed in different ways. Several opportunities are given to farm owners who want to develop new activities on the farm. For example there is a special rural development program administered at the county level. This program is meant to enable business development that focuses on long-term, economically sustainable value creation and decentralised settlement based on agricultural resources. There is also a programme for food production available for those who aim for developing competitive and profitable high quality food firms. In this context the competence, motivation, economic resources and capacity of the farmer and the family members, and also the local social network will influence how the resources of the farm are being utilized.

Local production milieu/network of producers, advisors

For potential new farmers the attractiveness of the farm is also related to the professional environment the farm is part of. The development in agriculture has resulted in a reduction of farmers with a certain kind of production in each locality. The result is an increase in the distance to the professional and also social networks (Fjeldavli and Bjørkhaug 2000). And according to Villa (1999) young farmers point to the problems related to being a professional minority in the rural localities and the lack of a professional local network is considered a problem.
In many studies it is not only the networks of farmers that are emphasized as important for the future farm but also social capital, particularly related to social networks in the locality which can, in different ways, influence the information, ideas and help which the new farmer can receive (Johnsen 2003, Borch and Førde 2010, Rønning 2008, Andgard 2009, Vergunst and Shucksmith 2009). Some localities appear more innovative than others and new ideas are received in positive ways (Borch and Førde 2010). Lønning (2008) shows how this can involve not only a locality, but also interaction between different actors at a municipal level. Johnsen (2003) shows the importance of the local social and cultural context for how farmers manage different challenges in agriculture in her study from New Zealand. The social context concerns the help the social network can provide. The cultural factors are related to conceptions and values attached to being a good farmer and what kinds of production and changes in production that are accepted and recognized locally. The local social and cultural conditions can in this way be considered as factors which influence the attractiveness of taking over a farm because they will in different ways impact on the economic and social outcome from the farm.

Local and regional labour markets
Agriculture constitutes only a part of farming families’ incomes and there are regional differences in the availability of alternative jobs and the possibility for additional jobs on the farm. According to Melberg (2002) there is a tendency for new generations of farmers to work more outside the farm than previous generations. Among younger farmers it is relatively common with triple combinations where both partners on the farm have off-farm work. Women, as spouses of the farmer take on off-farm work and participate less in farming. When men are the spouse of the farmer, they tend to work more at the farm, even if they have off farm work (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune 2007). The location of the farm has implications for what kind of labour market is available and type of production influences the possibility for off-farm work.

The eastern and central parts of the country can offer far better opportunities than northern Norway. In the eastern part of Norway 93 % of the potential new farmers say that it would be easy for their partner to get a job within daily commuting distance, while in northern Norway only 62 % said the same (Andgard et.al. 2009). And as has been shown, more farms seem to have a successor in the eastern and central areas compared to northern Norway (Logstein 2010). The closeness to (urban) centres seems therefore to be attractive for many farm households. As the majority of the farmers are men, the majority of farmers’ partners are women. In the labour market there is a gendered division of labour which is particularly evident in rural areas, and the majority of women in rural areas work in the public sector. The farm households and the farms are therefore dependent on income from the public sector. As many of the services and jobs in the public sector are dependent on a certain demographic basis, a decrease in the population will affect the labour market. As Niedomysl and Amcoff (2010) state, rural areas in many sparsely populated countries on the whole are experiencing population decline. In this way the economic basis for agriculture is connected to both demographic factors and the public sector. The challenges related to family farm succession are therefore linked to general challenges in rural areas.

In a study of holders of allodial rights there was correlation between the labour market and the younger generation’s willingness to take over the farm and the prospect of getting an
off-farm job was one of the dominate factors in the decision making process (Eldby 1996). Women’s increased participation in the labour marked outside the farm has been described as one of the most important structural changes within farming households (Bleksaune 1999). The variation in the available labour market will therefore influence the attractiveness of different farms. Off farm work can, in addition to contributing to the relative low income from agriculture, compensate for the loneliness many farmers express and may also be important for identity management and for use of their formal qualifications (Fjedlavli and Bjørkhaug 2002, Uthus 2002). Participation in the labour market outside the farm has therefore both an economic and a social aspect. Rye (1999) and Melberg (2002) also find that younger farmers are more motivated to take on off-farm work than older farmers, and that being a full time farmer was not a central aim for younger people. This can be related to an increased level of education among farmers (Løwe 1998), which might motivate them to have a connection to the labour market outside the farm.
7. CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE HOUSEHOLD/FAMILY/PERSONNEL

Crucial for family farm succession are how the potential farmers and their families consider and value the farm, the impact of farming on the way of life and the farm location. Agriculture cannot be regarded as an occupation which attracts newcomers as a profitable economic activity, therefore the social and cultural aspects of family farming need to be included for understanding family farm succession.

Way of life and occupational identities

Interest in agricultural work is the main reason for new farmers entering agriculture according to the study of the holders of allodial rights mentioned above (Andgard et al. 2009). The same study shows that interest in agricultural work is often related to having participated in agricultural work with parents. It concerns a question of feeling at "home". In this way interests, and the feeling of duty and belonging are intertwined. The meaning related to being a farmer and a good farmer therefore has different dimensions. Burton et al. (2008:20) propose that for farmers, (embodied) cultural capital is constructed through the performance of everyday activities and is manifest primarily at the level of farming skills possessed by the farmers. Those production activities that symbolise good farming and capital corresponding to being a ‘good farmer’ can be rewarded with other forms of capital.

In a study of Norwegian farmers, Bjørkhaug (2006c:126-127) identified typical farmers (farming habitus), with values corresponding to those of good farmers (Burton 2004) or good agriculture (Vedeld et al. 2003). Common to these farmers was their recruitment from within the farming family. They had succeeded the family farm on allodial rights, they knew they were going to inherit the farm and pursue farming as a career. As such, they learnt farm work from early childhood. Few had higher education or experience from other jobs or careers. Bjørkhaug (op.cit.) further identified additional types, among farmers without a family connection to the farm, farmers that had bought the farm or married a person with allodial rights to the farm. For these farmers, farming was never a pre-ordained career path. They farmed out of a free will and their own interest. The farmers’ differing experiences and dispositions stood out through their motives, practices and prospects. Female farmers were also ‘different’ in this regard. Women have not been expected to take over the farm if a brother existed. Still socialisation of girls as potential farmers is weak. Many girls, even first-born children, are not trained or socialised to become sole farmers (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2006, Bjørkhaug 2007, Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune 2008). A third distinct group of farmers was farmers with a previous or existing career outside farming. Identification of different types of farmers allowed for a conceptualisation of practices; one ‘traditional’ way of practising agricultural production and one characterized by independent farming practices. The first group maintained traditional farming practices, modernising and rationalising as required by economy or regulations, but the main production was maintained over time. This type of farming is taken-for-granted and represents an unquestionable way of managing the farm and production. The other groups of farmers more often represented independent farming practices. An ‘independent’ farmer could change his or her production completely to meet the circumstances. It was also among these farmers’ entrepreneurs and environmentally engaged (e.g. organic) farmers were found. Most farmers were found to be
concerned with their ability to sustain their own farm, and the ability of neighbouring farmers to do the same for the sake of rural communities and cultural landscapes.

**Gender and gendered division of labour**

Different regions represent different structural, social and cultural opportunities for young women and men; McDowell (1999) states that both places and people are gendered and Forsberg (2001) uses the concept ‘gender contracts’ to capture the mutual shaping of place and gender. These gender contracts concern what kinds of possibilities there are for men and women for shaping their lives in relation to gendered norms, values and structural conditions like the labour market. The gender contracts are constituted by the rules men and women use in satisfying their social, economic and political needs (Forsberg 2001:162). Gender contracts guide the perceptions of what proper gender behaviour ought to be; the gender aspect of social norms. To study gender contracts is to identify the sex/gender distinctions in specific places, analyze the gendered actions of institutions and individuals and characterize the structures of power relations in the construction and maintenance of the contracts as well as resistance and tendencies to weaken the contrasts. Therefore the available labour market is particularly relevant in a gender perspective.

Agriculture is an occupation with clear cultural expectations concerning the division of labour and gendered positions; the typical farmer is a man (Haugen 1998, Brandth 2001, Silvasti 2003, Crockett 2004). Silvasti (2003) talks about the gendered division of labour as one of the cultural scripts in agriculture and one of these scripts is the gendered division of labour. Favouring a male successor is strongly intertwined with this script. Favouring male farmers is also the general pattern in Norway. Heggem and Bjørkhaug (2006) found that recruitment to farming starts with early socialisation. Often boys are taught what is considered ‘real’ farm work and handling machinery from early childhood, even though they have older sisters with allodial rights. When taking over the farm becomes an issue, the symbolic value of knowing farming is given more weight than formal rights (Heggem and Bjørkhaug op.cit). Different studies show that farm wives defend values related to family and gendered division of labour that are often considered as traditional or conservative. In line with Forsberg (2001) it is possible to claim that rural areas represent a certain kind of gender contract where the opportunities in the labour market are more restricted and the expectations related to men and women are more traditional. Melberg (2001) claims that women in farming households are more often considered and operates as housewives compared to other women. This image of women in rural areas being more conservative and traditional and less concerned with issues related to gender equality is also found in other studies in Norway. Skålnes (2001) has developed the categories Conserva, Moderna and Alterna to describe different perspectives on women’s lives in rural areas related to different ideologies of women. They are expressed in women’s construction of life projects. The Conserva form the largest group of women in rural areas and form their life projects based on being related to and subordinated to the family. For Moderna women success in working life is equally important as family life and this group is growing. The Alterna women, who represent the smallest group, form their life projects in new ways, crossing the borders to new kinds of lives for women. For the settlement in rural areas, the Conserva women are central as the love project related to husband and family influences their decision for where they want to live.
These gendered differences become visible in the motivation for running a farm (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2006). While for women the main reason for becoming a farmer are interests in living in rural areas and having good conditions for raising children, men emphasize their interest for agricultural activities as the most important reason for becoming a farmer; women are more interested in the qualities of the place while the men are more interested in the production. Bjørkhaug, Heggem and Melberg (2006) further shows that it is central for women farmers’ self-image to be identified as ‘real’ farmers, not farmers’ wife or farm women. Through active involvement in farming, female farmers gain respect and involvement in planning and decision-making of the farm production equal to male farmers. Farm women, i.e. women living on a farm, not working there, were not expected to participate in decision making (Bjørkhaug et.al op.cit.).

In this way it is possible to claim that agriculture and rural areas are still connected to certain scripts for gender which can be described as traditional and also heteronormative. The exception is active women farmers. Certain ways of performing gender seem to dominate in the representation and also of those who are attracted to live in these areas. Therefore there seems to be a tension between the discourses about gender equality and the opportunities agriculture and rural areas represent, both culturally and socially.

**Age, generation and retirement**

Retirement and succession are closely related processes. Succession concerns transfer of a social position as owner of a farm with rights and duties from one generation to the next while retirement involves withdrawal from a social position which has economic and social implications. Inheritance concerns the transfer of economic assets related to the succession process. In order to succeed it is necessary that someone retires in order to let others take over the position. According to Gasson and Errington (1993) there has not been written much about farmer’s retirement decisions. And after a search of literature, it is possible to claim that even today this theme is marginal in the literature about family farm succession despite the fact the retirement from agriculture can be considered as ‘the mirror image of succession’ (Gasson and Errington op.cit.:210).

In Norway the average age for new farmers is 50 years, and there are regional differences where the more attractive areas in the south-western and eastern parts have an average of 47.3 years while in northern Norway the average age is 55.2 (Statistics Norway 2011b). In the county of Nordland it is 52.7 years, however, the average age of owners of agricultural properties is in the county of Nordland 61 years (Rønning 2006). While the average age for succeeding the farm is high, those farmers who stay in production took over the farm on an average age around 30 years (Bjørkhaug 2009).

The holder of allodial rights does not stay on the farm until it is time to take over, but start their educational and occupational career outside the farm. This means that the potential successors have finished their education and have probably also made their entrance into the labour market before they take over the farm. Whether the potential new farmer has to move away or not in this period depends on the regional job opportunities. If the older generation waits until ordinary retirement age, the new generation might be in a life phase and life situation when it is difficult or not attractive to change occupation and take over a
farm. Thus the timing for the older generation to withdraw from agriculture and let the younger generation take over represents a challenge.

An important question related to retirement and succession concerns how the process is prepared and talked about by different actors. What are the thoughts of the retiring farmers concerning the positive and negative aspects about agriculture as an occupation? Will they recommend to their children to take over the farm? The process of pointing out the successor often starts when they are young and is followed by participation on the farm in different activities (Eldby 1996, Keating and Little 1997, Lund 2000). A central question is whether the discussions concerning who is going to take over, when and how it is going to happen, are open or not, and how they occur. How the discussions about succession are handled, influences the planning and the preparations for those who are going to take over. As succession concerns heritage, it also concerns how this is handled among the siblings. Therefore it may involve different families. Whether taking over the farm is considered as a duty and burden or as a benefit will influence these discussions. The processes related to inheritance may often involve conflicts, particularly when the objects may have more immaterial than material value (Daugstad 1999). In this way taking over a farm and becoming a farmer concerns not only an occupation and economic activity, but transfer and management of both material and symbolic values.

**Competence and education**

Modern agriculture requires a variety of knowledges and competences therefore relevant questions concern what kind of competence the successors and the conveyors have and/or think they need in order to run the farm. This involves questions about what a farmer, and a good farmer is considered to be. How the successor and the elder generation cooperation, will influence how the knowledge is used in the development of the farm and also the succession process.

In order to use the resources on the farm in the marginal areas, Rønning (2006) claim that it is necessary to differentiate between the production and development of alternative strategies for economic development on the farm. According to Rønning (2006) this will require development of new attitudes among the farmers and need for education and new competence. In order to achieve successful succession of farms as economic basis for households in these areas, the question is whether the potential new farmers have the attitudes, knowledge and also the economic resources to develop agriculture in this way. This kind of differentiation would also require a change in agricultural policy with a differentiation in economic incentives and development of new competence in agricultural counselling (Rønning 2006).

Studies in different countries show that an increase in the educational level for the potential new farmers is negatively correlated to motivation for taking over the farm (Ochoa et.al. 2007; Andgard 2009). In the Norwegian context that is particularly the case for young women. Undertaking higher education is a personal and economic investment and the question is whether taking over the farm will give credit for this investment. Niedomysl and Amcoff (2010) show that people with higher education in general are less inclined towards living in rural areas than people with a low level of education. Also Rye (2006) points to this connection between educational level and habitus of young people with agricultural
background which influences plans to stay and take over a farm. Those who plan to stay/move back have lower education than those who do not plan to stay in rural areas. However, in a study of young farmers in Norway, Stubberud and Samseth (2000) found that 75% had agricultural education, but only 9% at a higher level. Rønning (2007) finds that the educational level contributes to the farmers’ strategic focus. For those who are already recruited to agriculture, higher education represents an asset for coping with challenges. Female farmers are found to hold a higher level of agricultural education than male farmers (Heggem and Bjørkhaug 2006).

The farmers unions together with the Ministry of agriculture and food have been found to be reluctant to formalise educational claims for farming (Forbord and Bjørkhaug 2009). They believe formal competence will increase the obstacles for entering farming. The rural women’s organisation on the other hand argues that formal competence will strengthen and promote the status of farming and with that young peoples’ interest in joining. Social and cultural changes related to increased educational level among young people, what expectations men and women have regarding a job and the balance between family and work are factors which can influence family farm succession in different ways; both whether there will be any succession or not and also how the farm is developed afterwards.
8. FAMILY FARM SUCCESSION AND RECRUITMENT TO AGRICULTURE - FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

Farm succession and recruitment to agriculture is essential for the purpose of achieving the goals of Norwegian agricultural policy. It is a political statement that agriculture, in addition to producing food and fibre should produce common goods such as sustainable rural communities, environmental and cultural goods and long term food security (St. meld. 19 (1999-2000). In this way continued farming is also a goal in marginal areas of Norway. A consequence of the technological development and increased efficiency of food production is however a decreasing number of active farms. For some local communities the result is that they may lose many active farms because there is only land for very few or just one farm in the locality with negative effects for professional networks and for the meaning of agriculture locally. Increased pressure on effectiveness may therefore be a threat for farming in the most marginal areas. In addition, the decrease in population in these regions reduces the opportunities for off farm jobs in the public sector. In the analysis of the development of agriculture, particularly in the more marginal rural areas, it is necessary to incorporate the interdependence of agriculture and the public sector at the household level.

It is argued that some key events have slowed the pace of an economic downturn for Norwegian farms, thus postponing, or averting, the predicted demise of the family farm structure. Examples of this have come through planned policies since the 1960’s with aims for a stable family farm system (Almås 1984, 1994). Political welfare issues have been on the agenda from the 1970s where securing a certain income level for farmers was a central goal. This goal was not achieved, but the process gave the farmers other substantial welfare gains (Almås 1994) and opened for a short period of optimism and growth in Norwegian agricultural production (Blekesaune and Almås 2002, Almås 2004). In 1984, Almås concluded that part-time farming was replacing full-time farming and this process has increased since then (Blekesaune 1996, Bjørkhaug 2007). Economic considerations are often used as a reason why farms are closed down. Research has however questioned the causal relationship between profitability and the propensity to remain in or leave farming showing how factors such as values, traditions, self-esteem and identity also impact upon farmers decisions to remain in farming even though economic prospects are low (Bjørkhaug 2007, Burton et.al 2008, Flemsæter and Setten 2009).

Agricultural production is an economic activity with importance for rural areas in different ways. Farming is not only an economic activity, but is intertwined with questions concerning life style, perceptions of gender, belonging and tradition. In addition, family farming includes a variety of types of production. Therefore family farm succession is a complex issue and process. The challenges related to family farm succession vary therefore for potential new farmers according to regional differences in farming regions and the new farmers’ wishes for the way of life they prefer, in addition to agricultural policy and general economic development. Agriculture and rural areas have had and still have a central role in the representation of the national identity in Norway. Hence the future of agriculture is not only a question of agricultural production and regional development. Recruitment and the means for recruitment to agriculture are, as Forbord and Bjørkhaug (2009) argue, political and also
potential controversial issues as development of different economic and political incentives and means will develop and encourage different kinds of agriculture.

The number of farms has declined while the changes in the total amount of cultivated land are less striking due to increases in the amount of rental land. However, not all agricultural land is rented out and kept in production. The lack of agricultural activity has been linked to a loss in biodiversity (Olsson and Rønningen, 1999). Studies also indicate that rented land is managed poorly compared to privately own land (Lobley and Potter 2004, Carolan 2005, Dramstad and Sang 2010). Stokstad (2009) also found that hired and not owned land (in northern Norway) more often ended up partly abandoned. This means loss of agricultural and also cultural landscapes in Norway. A question in this context is whether the reduction of farms, and particularly in the more marginal areas, should be considered as a problem or not. And what kind of problem is it, and for whom? Is it a problem for agriculture and for the total agricultural production, for food security or for people who want to engage in agricultural production or/and have and additional source of income in order to maintain a living in rural areas?

Agriculture represents the point of intersection for many interests and values, of the modern and the traditional. How we should think about challenges for a successful succession process in family farming is connected to questions about the role of agriculture for people, regions, localities and the nation. Related questions concern what standards family farm succession should be evaluated according to; the use of agricultural land and the profitability of the agricultural production, the maintenance of the cultural landscape, providing people who want to live in rural areas with an income or the maintenance of an agricultural property within a family.

There are variations in the role of and conditions for agriculture in different parts of Norway. The potential for maintaining a farm is related to the potential new farmers’ own expectations and motivations but must also be in accordance with present regulations, economic basis and values of the farming community. Therefore taking over a farm does not represent the same kind of situation and challenges for all. Some questions are left open to be answered:

- Who are the future farmers of Norway; what kinds of farmers will they be?
- Where will future farming take place?
- What role will agriculture have in the future development of rural areas?
- What is the future relation between sustainable rural areas and population development?
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